

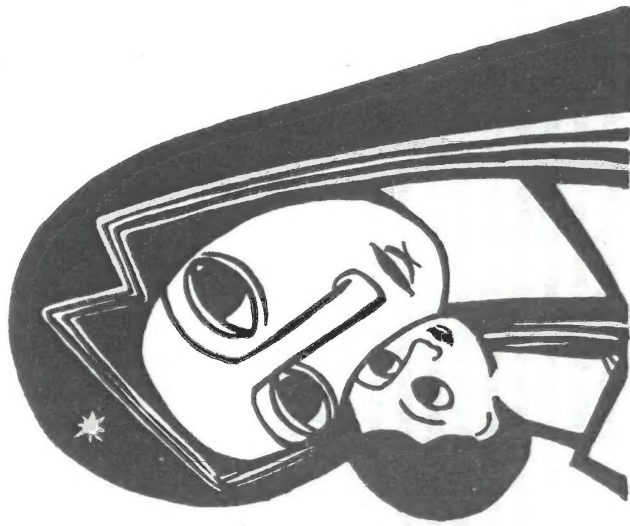
Both chapels have thankfully been restored for worship. Both still in their different ways are important in the modern cathedral. They are loved by those who share in its life, as the mediaeval chantry chaplains did, and Our Lady Undercroft is especially an inspiration to visitors - both those who belong to our tradition, and those who do not, but yet are fascinated by the altar with its screens and the small points of light before it.

## NOTES

1. Reproduced e.g. Joan Evans, *Art in Mediaeval France* (Oxford, 1948), Pl. 8.
2. *Inventories of Christchurch Canterbury*, ed. J. Wickham Legg and W.H.St.J. Hope (London, 1902), p. 111
3. *ibid.*, pp. 96-9
4. C.E. Woodruff, 'The Chapel of Our Lady in the Crypt of Canterbury Cathedral', *Archaeologia Cantiana* xxxviii (1926), p. 155. Woodruff himself thought the screens were of a later date
5. Legg and Hope, *op. cit.*, p. 99
6. C.R. Humphrey Smith, 'Heraldry in the Chapel of Our Lady Undercroft', *Canterbury Cathedral Chronicle* 81 (1987), pp. 45-8
7. H. Wharton, *Anglia Sacra* (London, 1961), i pp. 63-4
8. Woodruff, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-64
9. *The Chronicle of John Stone*, ed. W.G. Searle, (Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 34, 1902), pp. 34, 61
10. *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, ed and trans. C.R. Thompson (Chicago, 1965), p. 308
11. Roger Bowers, 'The Liturgy of the Cathedral and its Music', *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (forthcoming)
12. *Customary of the Benedictine Monasteries of St Augustine of Canterbury and St Peter Westminster*, ed. E.M. Thompson, Henry Bradshaw Society, i (London, 1902), p. 144
13. Roger Bowers, 'Some Observations on the Life and Career of Lionel Power', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 102 (1977), pp. 115-22
14. Legg and Hope, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-3
15. *ibid.*, pp. 164-5
16. Roger Bowers, personal communication
17. 'A Short Survey of the Western Counties ...', ed. L.G. Wickham Legg, *Camden Miscellany* xvi (3rd series. LII) (London, 1936), p. 16
18. *ibid.*, p. 12
19. A. Hussey, 'Further Notes from Kentish Willis', *Archaeologia Cantiana* xxxi (1915), p. 38

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# THE TWO LADY ALTARS IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

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*A paper read to the Canterbury branch  
of the Society in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral  
on November 11th, 1989*

## THE TWO LADY ALTARS IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

by Mrs Margaret Sparks MA

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Canterbury Cathedral has two Lady Chapels, one in the Western Crypt, known as Our Lady Undercroft, and one off the North-west Transept or Martyrdom, known as Our Lady Martyrdom. These chapels at Canterbury must first be set briefly in their historical context within the tradition of other English cathedrals and great churches. In the twelfth century there was an increase in devotion to our Lady, witnessed in St Anselm's Prayers and spread widely by St Bernard and the Cistercian order. This devotion had an expression in architecture, as new chapels were built. The Galilee at Durham, at the west end of the cathedral, is the Lady Chapel and was probably built as such: it was in use by 1189. But usually the Lady Chapel in an English cathedral is to be found at the east end, where it is commonly in the form of a rectangular hall-like structure beyond the retro-choir or ambulatory. Many were built in the 1220s, more about 1300 and on into the fourteenth century. They have good windows, and are usually light and elegant places, many of them in regular use for smaller services than those held in the choir.

But in Canterbury this pattern was not followed in the two great monastic churches. At St Augustine's Abbey, the Lady Chapel was in the crypt of the Romanesque church, in the eastern chapel. When there was need for a public Lady Mass, a chapel in the nave was used, and not until the later fifteenth century was a chapel built at the extreme east end of the church.

At Christ Church, the Anglo-Saxon Lady Chapel was in a western apse, looking down the church to the Altar of Christ in the eastern apse. The archbishop had his throne in our Lady's apse - an arrangement hard to visualise now, when the bishop is usually enthroned at the east end of his cathedral. The Anglo-Saxon church was destroyed by fire in 1067. In the new Romanesque church of Archbishop Lanfranc, built for the cathedral Priory, the monks' choir was in the two eastern bays of the nave beside the crossing, and the great rood-screen was beyond it to the west, in the same position as the screen still is at St Alban's Abbey, built by Lanfranc's nephew Paul. Within the rood-screen, beside the choir on the north side, was the Lady Chapel which was part of the monastic enclosure. When the church was extended under Anselm, the rood-screen was moved to the western arch of the crossing (under the tower). The Lady Chapel became a public place, and probably for this reason a new chapel was made in the crypt of the new church. Perhaps the idea of Our Lady Undercroft (as the new chapel was called) came from the crypt chapel of Notre Dame sous Terre at Chartres.

## Our Lady Undercroft

A crypt was originally a small safe place underground for burial or for keeping a special relic. The body of the local founding saint would be buried underground, and then a space would be made round the burial for those who honoured him to visit the tomb - as for example the tomb of St Germain at Auxerre. St Augustine, the founder of Canterbury cathedral, was buried at his abbey outside the city walls, but St Dunstan, an important Canterbury saint, was buried in the Anglo-Saxon crypt in the cathedral. Later crypts were enlarged as building techniques improved. In Germany by the eleventh century hall-crypts were built, complete churches underground. The same thing was done at Christ Church. The new crypt (the Western Crypt) is a spacious church where our Lady had her altar within the apse, specially marked out by columns with swirling patterns. There were Romanesque screens round the altar on the same footings as the existing ones of the late fourteenth century. There is a 'nave' area in the crypt where the vault has stone ribs, and a 'chancel' area where the ribs are plastered - here the vault would perhaps have been painted, as in St Gabriel's Chapel. There would have been a statue of our Lady and the Holy Child: a very attractive wooden statue of about 1130 (the date of the Canterbury crypt) is now at St Denis in Paris. This shows the type of sculpture which might have been at the altar of Our Lady Undercroft.<sup>1</sup>

In the years after the martyrdom of Becket, the crypt was invaded for a time by pilgrims to his tomb in the eastern chapel beyond the apse, but in 1220 Becket's body was translated to the shrine in the Trinity Chapel behind the High Altar, and the crypt would have been quieter again, although pilgrims still came to see the site of his burial. Candles were burned before the Lady Altar - the earliest mention of them found so far is in a will of 1362.<sup>2</sup> Two of King Edward III's sons were educated at the Priory. Edward the Black Prince had a long-standing devotion to the place, in particular to the Chapel of Our Lady Undercroft. In 1363 he founded a chantry chapel for himself and his wife, not at the Lady Altar, but at two altars in the South East Transept undercroft nearby. The Romanesque architecture was transformed by exquisite work of the mid-fourteenth century court style. The Black Prince wished to be buried before our Lady's altar. At his death in 1376 he left to the altar a set of white vestments embroidered with a vine pattern; a frontal with the Assumption pictured on it; two silver candlesticks with twisted stems; two silver basins; a gilt and enamelled chalice and two cruets in the form of angels (the beautiful metalwork which was once in these churches is easily forgotten - an almost lost English art form).<sup>3</sup> It was thought that protection was needed for these treasures. A Cathedral Priory Treasurer's account for 1377-8 lists a sum of £50 spent on an iron grill round the apse between the piers and an inner grill between the two bays of the chapel itself. The inner grill fitted into the existing stone screens, so they were built before 1377, and probably before the Black Prince's death.<sup>4</sup>

The Black Prince was not buried in the crypt, but had his tomb on the south side of the



Trinity Chapel as deserving the highest honour of lying beside Becket's shrine. There was eventually a burial beside the chapel, that of Joan Burgersh, Lady Mohun. She had had a long-standing connection with the Priory community. Her husband had been a soldier companion of the Black Prince and was a Garter Knight. She is said to have procured a donation from Richard II for the rebuilding of the nave. She was obviously considered a good friend to the Priory in that she was allowed to set up a tomb and chantry for herself at the Lady Altar in 1395.<sup>5</sup> Her tomb cut into the recently erected screen on the south side. She died in 1404 at the Priory's grandest guest-house, and left the monks the residue of her goods. Her effigy lies on the tomb, dressed in elaborate court fashion. A heraldic lion (for Burgersh) is at her feet, and there are lion masks on the damaged canopy overhead.

The Priory monks continued to honour the Lady Altar. Perhaps in the 1430s the vault of the chapel was painted in red with gold stars and suns which contained mirror glass to pick up the light from the candles. Just above the screens the vault is painted with groups of shields of noblemen who had connections with the place. Many have been identified, but the purpose of their particular grouping here is at present unknown.<sup>6</sup> A new window was made to let in more light on the south side, possibly in the 1490s when there were works in the crypt to prevent flooding. In 1500 Cardinal Morton was buried before the Lady Altar where the Black Prince had hoped to lie. Morton asked that his tomb should be not *in tumultu* above but *in secreto* below<sup>7</sup> - clearly crowds in the cathedral were much the same then as now. A stone slab with a brass marked the grave: the memorial effigy is within an arch to the south beside the ambulatory.

Records among the many remaining Priory documents provide information about the monks' use of the chapel. There was a monk Warden of St Mary's Altar who was in charge, with a secular chapel clerk as his assistant. (There was no separate Warden for the Lady Chapel in the nave, as there was at St Augustine's.) The accounts for 1510 are preserved.<sup>8</sup> They exemplify an arrangement which had been in force for perhaps two hundred years. The monk Warden in that year was called Thomas Anselm - there was a fashion at that time for monks to take a saint's name as a surname, instead of being called Thomas Sturry or Thomas Chartham from their home village. Dom Thomas had to pay his expenses out of the offerings at the box of his altar (nearly £22 in his year of office), except for the cost of wax. He had to provide candles for a silver candelabrum before the Lady statue, and wax for a bowl or lamp hung from the chapel roof. He was provided with extra wax from the Prior for these, in addition to 100 lbs of wax which he 'bought' as a cross-departmental payment. He had a few small rents given to sustain lights at the altar, as was customary in a parish church. Votive masses were said at the Lady Altar, and it was sometimes used by young monks saying their first mass. The Warden said mass daily. Three times a year there was a sung mass - at the feasts of the Purification, the Assumption, and the Nativity of our Lady. The subprior celebrated with an epistoller and gospeller, assisted by a monk wearing a cope. If the Warden was away - the monks had holidays from time to time at Priory manors - he had to pay someone else to say the daily mass. He had to sleep in his office to guard his chapel: the office was most probably in St

Gabriel's chapel (not in use as a chapel at that time). All the Shrine Keepers and Altar Wardens had to sleep within the church to guard their treasures. A fifteenth-century chronicle relates that on special occasions the boys from the Almonry Chapel outside the Priory gate would sing a mass at the Undercroft altar, as on the visits of Queen Margaret in 1446 and 1454.<sup>9</sup> Other visitors, Erasmus and Colet in 1513, described (rather disapprovingly) the treasures of the chapel, behind the inner iron screen. These had accumulated over the years.<sup>10</sup>

The Priory was dissolved in 1540. The treasures and belongings of Our Lady Undercroft are not listed in the great inventory of April 10th that year. Perhaps they had already been carted away in September 1538 when Becket's shrine was dismantled. The Lady Chapel by the Martyrdom probably remained in use for some years, but nothing is known at present about the crypt. From about 1570 the 'nave' area of the Western Crypt was used as the French Church. The area beyond was a storehouse for scaffold poles and blocks of timber for the church workmen. The crypt was restored in 1893, and the Lady Altar was restored in 1924 by friends of Archbishop and Mrs Davidson. In 1949 an ivory statue of the Assumption of our Lady was given to replace the lost mediaeval one. On February 2nd, 1983, this was stolen. The present replacement was provided and put in place in May 1983, and is the work of Mother Concordia, OSB, of Minster Abbey near Ramsgate.

#### *Our Lady in the Nave (1077 - 1455)*

This was the chapel at the east end of the north aisle of the nave of Lanfranc's church, where from perhaps the late twelfth century there was a daily celebration of Lady Mass, and in the late thirteenth century eight monks were to sing the mass. In 1305 the eight were to be joined by four altar clerks, from the two Lady Chapels and the two Thomas Becket altars, one at the Shrine and one in the Martyrdom. The monk Precentor was to be present daily to preside over the choir of twelve.<sup>11</sup> At St Augustine's Abbey, a similar service was initiated outside the rood-screen in the nave about 1280, instead of the celebration in their chapel in the crypt, presumably with the idea that lay people might assist at the mass.<sup>12</sup>

When the nave at the Cathedral Priory was rebuilt, and finished in 1405, the Lady Chapel was reinstated in its former position. From 1438 there was a new choir, a choir of boys from the Almonry School who sang a plainsong Lady Mass with their Master, called the Cantor; they also sang an antiphon after Vespers. This was a fashion at the time in monasteries, cathedrals and collegiate churches: Canterbury was not among the first to set up such a choir; but when they did so, they chose a distinguished retired court musician, Lionel Power, to run the choir. He died in 1445 at the guest house, Prior Chillerden's Chambers, where he presumably lodged, and was succeeded after an interval of some months in 1446 by Thomas Ware, who was styled Master of the Singing Boys and Clerk of the Lady Chapel.<sup>13</sup>



### Our Lady Martyrdom

The Priory community thought to do honour to our Lady by having not just a new choir of singers but a new chapel. In September 1448 the first stone was laid. The site is the chapel off the North West Transept or Martyrdom. Formerly there were two chapels, one above the other, St Benedict below and St Blaise above. The outer walls and upper floor were taken down, and a new chapel was built, longer than the others, and therefore angled out awkwardly to the north, because of the width of the north choir aisle. It was designed by Richard Beke, Master Mason to the Priory, the designer of St Michael's and St Edward the Confessor's Chapels, and perhaps of the Pulpitum. The chapel has a fan vault and stone-panelled walls decorated with leaf and vine scrolls and decked out with angels bearing shields and with statues of saints in niches (all now lost). Prior Elham and Archbishop Stafford began the 'new work' of the chapel. Elham died the next year. Stafford died in 1442 and was buried before the door of the new chapel, so that those who come and go walk over him. Elham was succeeded by Prior Goldstone, who is always given credit for the building of the chapel - he was buried before the altar.<sup>14</sup> Stafford was succeeded by Bouchier, who presumably gave the stained glass, as it has shields of his family. So the new Lady Chapel was a very special work engaging the interest of Archbishop and Priory.

It was finished in 1455 and dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Mary and St Benedict. It was intended for music. In the western half there were stalls (as there still are in the Lady Chapel at Winchester). There was a desk for the cantor and two pairs of organs. Above the stalls were tapestries with angels. The altar stood on three steps. On the wall behind it was a cloth of gold embroidered with roses. White silk curtains hung at each side. There was a hanging lamp of copper gilt above the altar - the holes for the chains remain; one of them is in use for the modern pyx. There were four sets of white and gold vestments.<sup>15</sup> All this information comes from inventories, especially one dated c. 1530, which also lists the musicians' books: 'Volumes of polyphonic music in four, five and six parts, suggesting that within the constraints implicit upon a Lady Chapel choir, there was nothing being composed in the early sixteenth century that this choir would not have been able to sing.'<sup>16</sup> The Masters of the Singing Boys (whose names are known and some of whom have left compositions) added suitably skilled monks to the eight singing boys to form a choir to sing complicated polyphonic music, such as is to be found in the Eton Choir Book.

There is a sense in which all this came to an end in 1540, when the Priory was dissolved. For a few years the new cathedral choir used the chapel so long as the worship was conducted according to the Use of Sarum, before the coming of the English Prayer Book in 1549. But after that it was difficult at times to continue traditional music 'in choirs and places where they sing', and there was no time or inclination for extra services, except for a brief resurgence in the reign of Mary I. However, when visited by an army officer in 1635, the chapel was still called the Lady Chapel.<sup>17</sup> Later it declined into a burial place for

Deans, called the Preacher's Chapel. One Dean, Thomas Turner, even had his monument on the wall behind the place where the altar had stood, hiding the angel frieze (when this was removed in 1974, a complete undamaged painted angel was found behind it). The chapel was attacked by so-called Parliamentary Commissioners in 1643: other angels were decapitated and the statues in the niches were all destroyed. The great Mary window in the transept outside - so beautiful that the King of Spain had asked to buy it at lavish expense - was also destroyed at the same time.<sup>18</sup>

In the late eighteenth century the Dean and Chapter must have had some use for the chapel, as they provided its present graceful wrought-iron gate, in place of a battered wooden one. By 1925 the chapel had been restored to worship and set apart for private prayer, but it seemed a grey and dusty place, full of tombs. Between 1973 and 1975 the stonework was cleaned and repaired. It became again the chapel of Our Lady and St Benedict. More recently it was selected as the place for the daily said Matins at 7.30. The pyx was given in 1981 for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, and the statue of Our Lady and the Holy Child was given in the same year by the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The chapel is still used for private prayer: visitors admire it through the wrought-iron gate.

### A Comparison

This paper is a gathering of what is known about the chapels from architectural and documentary evidence, much of it garnered by others. In use the two have always been different. From the time of its founding, Our Lady Undercroft was very much a private place of devotion for the monastic community and those who shared its life, whilst the chapel by the Martyrdom was a public place of worship. Just as Cardinal Morton asked to be buried *in secreto* before Our Lady Altar and not *in tumultu* above, so others have loved to pray and burn candles in quietness at her crypt altar. It seems to have been especially loved by the chaplains who served the cathedral chantries - being seculars they did not 'belong' in the monastic choir.<sup>19</sup> Some visitors, like Erasmus and Colet, saw Our Lady Undercroft as a treasure house, but the treasures were probably irrelevant to the petitioners at the altar. It was a dark place lit by candles, both large and small, and they felt at home there, as modern people do.

The chapel by the Martyrdom is quite different. It is beautiful, architecturally elegant, even without its complement of statues and the painted stonework. Its orderly and complicated architecture will have fitted well with the complex music sung there. It was a place of musical excitement when the skilled monks and choristers and the distinguished Masters of the Singing Boys worked out new settings of mass and antiphons for our Lady's honour. It is good that in recent years something of the history of the chapel and fragments of the music sung there have been discovered by a Cambridge musicologist.